

**May 2021**

This Topical Digest lists all the 'Ideas Papers' prepared by policy analysts in the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) to stimulate discussion on the future of Europe. These cover policy areas from public health to international trade, civil protection to the transport situation. They seek to analyse how the coronavirus crisis has impacted various areas of EU policy and identify options for how those policies might be further developed in the future. A further set of Ideas Papers explore how the Union could develop greater resilience to withstand unexpected future shocks and strengthen its capacity for collective action.

Thinking about the future of EU policies**The future of work: Trends, challenges and potential initiatives**

Briefing by Monika Kiss, February 2021

The current coronavirus pandemic and its accompanying health and economic crises have highlighted and heightened certain trends and challenges which were already affecting the labour market in Europe. These include accelerated digitalisation and automation, increased use of artificial intelligence, constraints relating to a lack of digital skills, and problems concerning the status of platform workers and other workers in non-standard forms of employment. In parallel, there has been an unprecedented expansion in teleworking, and in the development of transport and delivery platforms, as a result of the need for social distancing during the pandemic. Many of these changes will outlive the current crisis and generate in turn new challenges, which the EU and Member States will need to address.

EU public health policy

Briefing by Gianluca Quaglio, July 2020

This paper explains the origins and current role of public health policy at European Union level, details how the Union has responded to the 2020 coronavirus pandemic to date, and analyses the European Commission's recent proposal for a flagship policy initiative in this field, the EU4Health programme, which could represent a 'paradigm shift' in how the EU deals with health. It then goes on to explore a range of possible further initiatives that could be taken to over the medium- to longterm to strengthen healthcare system across Europe.

Social and employment policies in Europe

Briefing by Nora Milotay, September 2020

Whilst the disruption caused by the coronavirus crisis has affected all segments of society, some groups and geographic areas have been impacted more seriously than others. The crisis has opened up the opportunity to rethink how and what could be done differently and more efficiently over the longer term in the social and employment field at European level, including the possibility of putting social and economic considerations and rights on a more equal footing within the Union's governance framework.

European Union food system

Briefing by Rachele Rossi, September 2020

The European Union (EU) food system is a complex and integrated structure of sectors whose governance is ensured by various EU sectoral policies. Its strengths and weaknesses became evident during the coronavirus crisis: food supplies were assured but the pandemic also revealed where action is needed to avoid disruptions threatening food supply. This Briefing sets out the progress to date towards an EU food system and the issues

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posed by the current coronavirus crisis. The table at the end of the text explores a range of ongoing or potential initiatives for a sustainable EU food system in the future.

[EU civil protection capabilities](#)

Briefing by Leopold Schmetzing, July 2020

Civil protection is the protection of people, the environment and property against natural and manmade disasters. The current coronavirus crisis has shown that the current structures and processes might still not be fit for purpose or in the required state of readiness. The EU needs to broaden and increase its capabilities. This paper explores the issue and identifies potential initiatives to further improve the structural and capability components of EU crisis response.

[European Economic recovery](#)

Briefing by Jerome Saulnier, July 2020

An intensive debate has opened up about the potential benefits of moving towards a higher degree of risk-sharing and collective 'strategic autonomy' for the Union, based on stronger and deeper common policies at EU level. The proposal for a 'Next Generation EU' recovery plan is likely to prove an important staging-point in this process. In practice, the size of the recovery response, the policy areas chosen for deepening, the financing options available to support them, and the degree to which they are matched by a greater willingness of the Union to 'act as one' on the international stage, are all likely to be determining factors in the outcome. This paper analyses some of the issues arising specifically in the economic field in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis and looks at a range of policy initiatives that could help build a broadly based and sustainable European economic recovery.

[Economic and monetary union](#)

Briefing by Angelos Delivorias, July 2020

Launched almost three decades ago, economic and monetary union (EMU) represents a very important step in the process of European economic integration. However, the recent sovereign debt crisis highlighted its incomplete design and some inherent instabilities. A series of measures were therefore taken to deepen EMU and thereby to increase its resilience. The current coronavirus pandemic has shown the urgency of many of them; recently submitted important proposals could lead to a noteworthy evolution in the architecture of EMU. This Briefing groups and highlights some of these proposals. The table at the end features a number of additional proposals in summary form.

[Climate change and climate action](#)

Briefing by Gregor Erbach, July 2020

The coronavirus crisis presents challenges as well as opportunities for policies to address the issue of climate change. Measures taken in reaction to the pandemic have led to a dramatic fall in economic and social activity, and to a corresponding temporary drop in greenhouse gas emissions. Certain behaviour changes adopted during the crisis, such as teleworking and video-conferences, may persist and lead to permanently reduced emissions related to commuting and business travel. On the other hand, use of private cars may increase if public transport is considered as unsafe. The economic crisis has had a negative impact on household or corporate finances, which may lead to reduction or delay to investment in low-carbon technologies.

[International trade policy](#)

Briefing by Jana Titievskaia, July 2020

The coronavirus pandemic caused a significant collapse in international trade in the first half of 2020. Trade accounts for a higher proportion of the EU economy than that of the United States of America (US) or China, which can make the EU's economic model more vulnerable to import and export disruptions. In recent years, the multilateral liberal trading order has already been facing unprecedented turbulence. Creative solutions, such as

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instruments to tackle foreign subsidies and the WTO pharmaceutical agreement can also help Europe to navigate the new geo-economic and post-coronavirus era of global trade successfully.

[Sustainable and smart transport in Europe](#)

Briefing by Jaan Soone, September 2020

Innovation will be critical for economic recovery – and the transport sector offers many opportunities for innovation to help drive the post-pandemic economy forward. The European recovery plan, centred around the Green Deal, places great emphasis on the growth potential of transforming the economy to a greener model and taking advantage of technological advancements and digitalisation to bolster European industrial competitiveness. This briefing surveys the challenges presented by the pandemic for urban mobility, and the potential of new technologies and digitalisation to provide solutions as well as to support the 'greening' of transport.

[Research and innovation](#)

Briefing by Cemal Karakas, October 2020

With less than seven per cent of the global population, the European Union (EU) accounts for almost 20 per cent of global investment in research and innovation (R&I). However, despite the well-known correlation between research, development, innovation and competitiveness, when it comes to R&I expenditure as a percentage of GDP, the Union performs poorly compared to South Korea, Japan, the United States (US) and China. Moreover, regional disparities in R&I and a lack of private investment are significant indicators of certain R&I related shortcomings at EU level.

Towards a more resilient EU

[Complementary Executive Capacity](#)

Briefing by Rafal Manko and Hendrik Mildebrath, January 2021

Against the backdrop of new and unprecedented crises and challenges, the advantages of coordinated approaches and effective cross-border responses are all the more evident, and gaining support among Europeans, as shown by recent Eurobarometer surveys. In this context, EU complementary executive capacity could be a way of meeting citizens' expectations, through complementing, without replacing, the executive capacities of the Member States. The concept of complementary EU executive capacity dovetails naturally with the ongoing transformation of the EU from a legislative union to a hybrid (legislative–executive) union, as it becomes more involved in implementing law rather than purely enacting it. Essentially, the notion repackages pre-existing administrative practices in a way that facilitates their operationalisation, draws attention to new areas of potential EU executive involvement, and presents a tool for communication with citizens that can be understood.

[Addressing violations of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights](#)

Briefing by Wouter van Ballegooij, September 2020

The common values of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights (DRF) lie at the heart of the European integration process and are central to the values of the European Union (EU). In practice, however, individual and collective (lack of) Member State action can undermine these common values. This situation applied before the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis, but some of the national measures taken since the outbreak of the pandemic have tested the resilience of these values further. This Briefing puts forward a set of proposals aimed at enhancing the EU's resilience to DRF violations. It focuses in particular on possibilities for the European Parliament and national parliaments, with their dual mandate from EU citizens, to jointly strengthen their monitoring and investigative capabilities.

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[Free movement within the EU](#)

Briefing by Costica Dumbrava, September 2020 The coronavirus outbreak and the measures taken to counter it have had a profound impact on the free movement of people, goods, services and capital in the European Union (the 'four freedoms'). The uncoordinated border restrictions introduced by Member States in the initial phase of their efforts to halt the spread of the virus all but suspended the free movement of people and greatly affected the free movement of goods and services, causing considerable disruption to the European single market. The pandemic has exposed pre-existing shortcomings in the implementation of freedom of movement in the EU. It has also highlighted the importance of free movement, necessary for the provision of essential goods, and based on closely integrated supply chains and the key contributions of mobile workers.

[Linking the levels of governance in the EU](#)

Briefing by Klemen Žumer and Yann-Sven Rittelmeyer, July 2020

The coronavirus crisis has further underlined the need for a more cohesive European Union (EU). Previous ideas about how best to link the levels of the EU's system of multilevel governance have become even more important, while new paths of cooperation have been opened by changes triggered by the crisis itself. Every level of governance, from the EU to the local, via the national and regional levels, has been affected by the crisis and all are involved in the response. This crisis has shown that coordination between the levels can improve and should be improved. EU decision making could become even more effective, efficient and legitimate if it draws appropriate lessons from the crisis.

[Strategic sovereignty for Europe](#)

Briefing by Suzana Anghel, September 2020

The current coronavirus pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of the European Union to external actors, and has enhanced its progress towards 'strategic sovereignty'. This notion signifies the ability to act autonomously, to rely on one's own resources in key strategic areas and to cooperate with partners whenever needed. To fully develop such strategic sovereignty, the EU needs to show political will and strengthen its capacity to act. It has to give up its silo approach to policies and address them in a more coordinated manner. It also needs to move progressively towards 'smart power': relying on 'soft power' tools, whilst incrementally developing 'hard power' ones, including a fully-fledged EU defence instrument.

[Digital sovereignty for Europe](#)

Briefing by Tambiama Madiega, July 2020

There is growing concern that the citizens, businesses and Member States of the European Union (EU) are gradually losing control over their data, over their capacity for innovation, and over their ability to shape and enforce legislation in the digital environment. Against this background, support has been growing for a new policy approach designed to enhance Europe's strategic autonomy in the digital field. This paper explains the context of the emerging quest for 'digital sovereignty', which the coronavirus pandemic now seems to have accelerated, and provides an overview of the measures currently being discussed and/or proposed to enhance European autonomy in the digital field.

[Protecting, promoting and projecting Europe's values and interests in the world](#)

Briefing by Naja Bentzen, September 2020

In its foreign policy, the European Union (EU) is committed to 'promoting its values and interests', which include democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, pluralism, peace and security, and multilateralism. Worldwide, however, the values and interests that the EU stands for are under mounting pressure, pressure that the pandemic has further intensified. Growing strategic great power rivalry – witnessed in the 'extraterritorialisation' of US-China tensions, growing pressure on human rights, and the (strategic) undermining of multilateralism – have left

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something of a moral global leadership vacuum. The need to reinforce the protection, promotion and projection of the EU's values and interests in the world has thus become much more pressing.

EU competitiveness and global growth

Briefing by Stanislas de Finance, September 2020

With rising tensions surrounding the multilateral and liberal trading order in recent years, and declining public support for globalisation, the coronavirus pandemic has hit the world economy hard. In the short term, the efforts of the European Union (EU) and its Member States, as well as many other jurisdictions, are focused on supporting a sustained and inclusive economic recovery and on protecting businesses, jobs and livelihoods. At the same time, policy-makers in Europe should seek to address medium- to long-term challenges to minimise long-term scarring and restore eroding competitiveness. Decisive action is needed to secure EU global leadership of environmental and digital transformation.

The future of multilateralism and strategic partnerships

Briefing by Elena Lazarou, September 2020

The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has exacerbated global geopolitical trends, including the struggle to uphold multilateralism in a climate of growing nationalism, protectionism and rising great power competition. At the same time, it has demonstrated the need for multilateral cooperation for the effective mitigation of cross-border threats, including health crises. Within this environment, the European Union (EU), a multilateral entity in itself, has illustrated the relevance of cooperation. Beyond its internal strengthening, the EU has set the defence and reform of multilateralism as one of its key priorities under the current European Commission.

Financing the European Union

Briefing by Fabia Jones, December 2020

Responding to requests for a common recovery plan to complement national efforts to tackle the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, substantial new EU financial instruments have been rapidly introduced such as temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE). In July 2020, the European Council agreed a recovery package based on a 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) of €1 074.3 billion, topped up with €750 billion in extra resources for EU programmes. This paper describes reforms already secured by the European Parliament and suggests further ideas that could be considered to improve the financing of the European Union.

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